

# Using Social Media in the Prevention of Child Abuse: An Analysis of Wisconsin's Campaign Programs

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Using Social Media in the Prevention of Child Abuse: An Analysis of Wisconsin's Campaign  
Programs

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*“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not” -  
Theodor Seuss Geisel*

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ABSTRACT

Using Social Media in the Prevention of Child Abuse: An Analysis of Wisconsin's Campaign Programs

By Kari L. Nuskiewicz

Under the supervision of Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller

Statement of the Problem

It is agreed upon that child abuse is a serious societal issue (Portwood, 2006; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Schuman, 2005). Every 10 seconds there is a report of child abuse made. "During Federal fiscal year 2009, an estimated 3.3 million referrals, involving the alleged maltreatment of approximately 6.0 million children, were received by CPS agencies" (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Maltreatment 2009). Although improvement is being made in both, the awareness and reporting of child abuse, a single child who suffers from abuse at the hand of someone who cares for him or her is too many.

Fear of their abuser and fear of possible consequences are reasons that many children do not disclose abuse in childhood. (London, et al, 2005; Hodson & Skeen, 1987). Since many children do not disclose their own abuse, the prevention of abuse needs to be in the hands of adults, educated in abuse awareness, and in offenders reporting their own abusive behavior and seeking treatment. Media campaigns have been designed to target adults in the prevention of drinking and driving, smoking, AIDS, and animal abuse; however, child abuse is still in need of greater campaign marketing (MMWR, 2001).

Child abuse prevention organizations, used in Wisconsin, such as The Children's Trust Fund, Stop It Now! and Darkness to Light, are increasingly utilizing social media campaigns in their prevention efforts. The social media provides a public resource to agencies, programs, and organizations in which to spread the word about their existence, resources, prevention tools, and treatment programs. Additionally they have the potential to create a positive image, expand their volunteer base, secure funding support, and bring offenders to self-disclosure (McCall, 1983). Social media has the power to create awareness of the problem of child abuse and raise the priority of the issue in the minds of people. It can create new attitudes in people, and can offer awareness of the services offered to aid in prevention or treatment of child abuse (McCall, 1983). Awareness of abuse as a serious problem is the first step to prevention.

The purpose of this research is to determine the value of social media as a tool in child abuse prevention, decide how to leverage it, and to evaluate elements of existing campaign programs in search of the ideal media initiative. Study of the social media campaign efforts and the effectiveness of the components of the initiatives, will provide a necessary resource for professionals and advocates when facing barriers to implementation or continuation of programming including conflicting attitudes, budgetary constraints, and uncertainty of outcome.

### Method of Approach

Research will consist of an overview of the problem of child abuse and neglect nationally and in Wisconsin including statistical data, theoretical implications, and a literature review including empirical findings. Peer reviewed library sources, government statistics, and data from state and national organizations on child abuse will be gathered and utilized in the study. Using secondary research, a content and methodological review of existing social media campaigns, including the Child Trust Fund, Stop it Now!, and Darkness to Light programs, will be included. Evaluative data will be reviewed in an analysis of the efficacy of such programs as well as for

the recommendation of changes that may enhance the social acceptability and improve effectiveness of the social media campaign. Conclusions and recommendations for social media components and initiative directions will be guided by the secondary research information reported in the study.

### Results of the Study

Research and evaluations on existing social media initiatives shows an increase in awareness and knowledge of abuse and abuse prevention. These programs may also have an effect on primary prevention behaviors if the message is reinforced over time. Since support and action is needed in the prevention of child abuse, it is necessary to first create awareness and interest in the issue, followed by evaluation and strong belief and support of the mission. Creation of an ideal media campaign designed for child abuse prevention might utilize a combination of popular social media venues that encourage sharing of information. Messages are more likely to elicit awareness and initial interest if they are empathetic and delivered by peers and laypersons, such as real survivors of abuse. Since the social media initiative is still fairly new in the field of child abuse prevention, more research is needed to determine what components are most likely to produce changes in preventative behaviors.

## Table of Contents

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE	i
TITLE PAGE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
SECTION	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	5
A. Child Abuse Statistics	5
B. Victim Effects and Treatment	8
C. Offender Behavior and Treatment	10
D. CAPTA and the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act	12
E. Public and Social Media	13
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	17
A. Strain Theories	17

B. Social Learning Theory	18
C. Social Control Theory	19
D. Routine Activity Theory	21
IV. EXAMINATION OF EXISTING SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS	25
A. The Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund	27
B. Stop It Now! Wisconsin	28
C. Darkness to Light	30
D. Federal Program Involvement	32
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	35
A. Media Venues Reaching Largest Audience	36
B. Messages That Elicit Response and Action	38
C. Organizations That Benefit From Social Media	40
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	42
REFERENCES	46



## **SECTION I: INTRODUCTION: USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE: AN ANALYSIS OF WISCONSIN'S CAMPAIGN PROGRAMS**

Driving down the highway, one looks ahead at a large billboard photo of a small girl's face, tears in her eyes, and saddened by hurt. The image reads large and clear, "Hug me. Don't hurt me." The media emphasizes the prevention message of positive parenting help and dealing with the root causes that can lead to child abuse (Blue Ribbon Task Force, 2008). Social media campaigns directed toward child abuse have the potential to not only illuminate the prevalence and detrimental consequences of abuse, but they also hold promise in creating new attitudes and raising awareness of treatment and preventative services. The historical silence associated with child abuse, as evidenced by the names of literature that professionals authored on the topic including, *The Best Kept Secret* (Rush, 1980), *Behind Closed Doors* (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1979), and *Hush* (Bromley, 2007), is being broken by an increased number of social media campaigns designed to increase awareness of the issue.

It is routinely acknowledged that child abuse is a serious societal concern (Portwood, 2006; London, Bruck, Ceci, & Schuman, 2005). The consequences of abuse are lasting, as longitudinal studies show a positive correlation between child abuse victimization and future delinquent or criminal behavior (Widom & Maxfield, 2001; Huesmann, Eron, & Dubow, 2002; Akers, 1994). Childhood abuse is also often an intergenerational cycle, in which the detrimental effects are experienced by the children of abused children as well, unless something is done to break the cycle (Hodson & Skeen, 1987). Aker's (1994) social learning theory provides a thorough explanation of how the learning of abusive behaviors present in the child's environment is passed on through generations. Statistically, one in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will

have been sexually abused before the age of 18 (Awareness to Action, 2010). In addition, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011) reports that the 2010 national rate of child maltreatment was 9.2 victims per 1,000 children, which includes instances of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological maltreatment. The distressing realization however, is that the rates of abuse are actually far greater due to non-reporting. Children are less likely to disclose abuse themselves during childhood due to fear of the abuser and the consequences that may occur as a result (London, et al, 2005; Hodson & Skeen, 1987). If children do not report abuse themselves, then prevention of future abuse is up to adult public awareness and offender self-reporting. This is where it is believed that the impact of social media campaigns can prove vital.

Adults are targeted via media in the prevention of drinking and driving, smoking, AIDS, and animal abuse; however, child abuse is still in need of greater campaign marketing (MMWR, 2001). Social Marketing initiatives have utilized some of the same strategies as do commercial marketing campaigns only to change social behaviors rather than promote a purchase. The aim is at the prevention of child abuse before there is a need to heal a victim or punish an offender (Pollard, 2006). *Stop it Now!* is a national program, which introduces social media campaigns to address child abuse and neglect. An important key to the program is awareness that the most effective prevention may lay in the abusers themselves or other adults who have the potential to intervene (MMWR, 2001). Billboards, posters, radio spots and discussions, and internet venues are increasingly being used to spread concern for child abuse, raise awareness, and recruit adults in an effort to stop the abuse. Wisconsin began the *Stop it Now!* program in 2007 and gained positive results with its radio campaign, but ended its affiliation in 2008 (Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 2012). Awareness to Action, a Wisconsin child sexual abuse awareness

organization, continued the prevention efforts gaining an affiliation with the *Darkness to Light* organization, which designs media campaigns to illuminate the prevalence and detrimental consequences of child abuse (Darkness to Light, 2012). *Darkness to Light* stresses the role of the adult in keeping children safe. Much effort on the treatment of child abuse has focused on child empowerment programs designed to teach children how to recognize abuse, keep themselves safe, and report (Portwood, 2006). These programs are definitely promising in child abuse prevention however, D2L asserts that just as a parent is responsible for buckling a child in a car seat for safety, it is the responsibility of the adult to keep children safe from abuse (Darkness to Light, 2010). Children who suffer abuse want to tell but they are afraid. Evidence supports the fact that most young children do not disclose victimization during their childhood, and many never report at all (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Schuman, 2005). Though research suggests that social media initiatives may be underutilized and more research is needed on effectiveness, using such programs to illuminate the problem of abuse, stress the adult role in prevention and, to educate adults may have the greatest potential for abuse prevention (Portwood, 2006; Darkness to Light, 2010; MMWR, 2001).

It is well known that child abuse goes largely unreported (London, et al, 2005; Hodson & Skeen, 1987). Expecting each, and every child victim of abuse to come forward and report, even with the help of abuse education and empowerment tools, is unreasonable. The challenge lies rather with society as a whole facing the true problem, which is that people we know and care about have lost control. If we encourage methods that provide knowledge and inspiration to the fight against child abuse, then we are steps closer to changing societal norms and governmental policies (Stop it Now!, 2008-2012). Child abuse is treatable and the war against it is gaining momentum.

The purpose of this research is to determine the value of social media as a tool in child abuse prevention, decide how to leverage it, and to evaluate elements of existing campaign programs in search of the ideal media initiative. This study will explore empirical and theoretical research including peer reviewed library sources, government statistics, and data from state and national organizations on child abuse victimization and social media campaign programs being used in Wisconsin and across the nation. Successful components of social media campaigns that have been used in the illumination and prevention of child abuse will be studied for insight into practices best suited for recommendations of an ideal social media campaign directed at the prevention of child abuse in Wisconsin. Theoretical applications will be explored including that of Strain Theories, Social Learning Theory, Social Control Theory, and Routine Activity Theory to provide the framework for campaign design and target audience recommendations.

This study will provide professionals, the justice system, advocacy groups, and organizations involved in child welfare in Wisconsin with research supported arguments that can be used to justify use of and the addition of media initiatives. This study will provide a useful resource for professionals, organizations, and advocates when facing barriers to implementation of social media initiatives or continuation of programming including conflicting attitudes, budgetary constraints, and uncertainty of outcome. Research on social media campaigns can provide an informed basis for staff and program funding in the prevention of child abuse. Additionally, awareness of the effective forms and uses of the social media in the prevention of child abuse can serve as precursor to an ideal social media campaign design aimed at the protection of our most valued resources, the children.

## **SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following review is divided into five parts. The first part provides important statistical data on child abuse including definitions and reporting trends on both a national level and for the state of Wisconsin. The second part reviews research on the effects of abuse on child victims and methods of prevention and treatment that are commonly used. The third part is a discussion of the literature on the behaviors of child abuse offenders and the prevention of those behaviors, as well as the commonly used treatment methods. The fourth part is a review of the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 and the research related to the advancements in child abuse prevention related to its inception. The fifth part reviews literature on existing social media initiatives both nationwide and in Wisconsin.

### **A. Child Abuse Statistics**

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which child abuse actually occurs. Estimates of abuse vary and it is agreed upon by experts that child sexual abuse is vastly under-reported. Reporting issues can be caused by inconsistencies in defining abuse, non-reporting, and under-recognition (Newton, 2001). The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g), as amended by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, states the following definition of child abuse or neglect: “[at minimum] ...any recent act or failure to act on the part of the parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.” Although CAPTA (2010) issues a federal minimum definition of abuse, and a formal definition regarding sexual abuse, the definitions of forms of abuse and criminal statutes are left up to the states. The definitions of the various forms of abuse can vary state to state and across organizations. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines the most

reported form of abuse, physical neglect, as the “failure to provide for a child's basic survival needs, such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, hygiene, and medical care... [and] may also involve inadequate supervision of a child and other forms of reckless disregard of the child's safety and welfare.” The second form of abuse and the form reported second most often is that of physical abuse, defined as abusive behavior that inflicts injury upon a child. “This may include, biting, burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating, or otherwise harming a child.” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, 2010). Sexual abuse is defined by CAPTA (2010) as the following:

The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Maltreatment, 2006).

Psychological maltreatment, which can sometimes be described as emotional abuse, has been historically difficult to define and can be encompassed within the other previous forms of abuse or can be inflicted on its own. It can include such detrimental behaviors as denying attachment or affection, degrading, threatening, exploiting, isolating, erratic parenting, and subjecting to visibility domestic violence (Kairys & Johnson, 2002). The inconsistencies in definitions of various forms of maltreatment, from state to state and organization to organization, can sometimes make reporting confusing and charging difficult. Each of these definitions of abuse and maltreatment, occurring separately or in combination, threaten the basic human rights of a child.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported in 2010 an estimated 3.3 million referrals to CPS agencies, involving the alleged maltreatment of nearly 6.0 million children. This equates to the fact that nearly every 10 seconds, there is a report of child abuse made. The national rate of child maltreatment in 2010 was approximately 9.2 per 1,000 children. In 2009, an estimated 4.8 children per day died because of maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

In 48 of the 50 states, there are now professionals who are mandated by law to report suspected abuse. These professionals include, “social workers, teachers and other school personnel, physicians and other health-care workers, mental health professionals, child care providers, medical examiners or coroners, and law enforcement officers” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). Of the 3.3 million referrals in 2010, 57% were made by professionals that were mandated reporters.

In 2010, in the state of Wisconsin, there were 61,763 reports of child maltreatment. As was the case in the national statistics, the largest number of reports came from professional mandated reporters. The most common form of child abuse reported in Wisconsin was neglect, followed by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. According to the Wisconsin Department of Children & Families, Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Report (2010), substantiated cases of maltreatment totaled 4,839 children in 2010. The allegations that were most substantiated in 2010 were those of neglect and sexual abuse. The rate for abuse of children in Wisconsin was less than the national rate at 3.7 children per 1,000 children. Due to higher rates of sexual abuse, there were greater numbers of female victims than males. There were 19 deaths in 2010 because of substantiated child maltreatment. Male offenders accounted for the majority of sexual abuse and physical abuse instances, while female offenders were more

likely to have neglected children. In the calendar year 2010, in Wisconsin, 83% of maltreatment offenders were primary caregivers of the child victim (Wisconsin Department of Children & Families, 2010).

Trends in reporting are promising despite the obvious seriousness of the cases that are substantiated. In the 20-year period from 1990 to 2009, the number of cases of both substantiated physical abuse and sexual abuse declined significantly. These reports show that the increase in prevention efforts over the past 30 years, are having an impact, though efforts to protect the children are still a challenge (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011).

## **B. Victim Effects and Treatment**

Effects of abuse during childhood have been found to be highly variable. Child abuse can have severe consequences of an emotional, psychological, social, or physical nature or seem to have little detrimental effect depending on the characteristics of the abuse and the child's existing risk and protective factors. For many cases, the immediate results can be harmful and debilitating, but the consequences that lead into the teens, young-adulthood, and adulthood are equally detrimental (Facts for Families, 2008; Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007; Saywitz, Mannarino, Berliner, & Cohen, 2000). The long-term effects of childhood abuse may include problems maintaining stable relationships, intimacy issues, a lack of trust, as well as, an increased risk of alcohol or drug abuse, psychiatric disorders, distress, and the sometimes hidden effect of abusive parenting as an adult (Facts for Families, 2008; Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007; Saywitz, et al, 2000; Widom, 1989).

Research shows that of those people that are admitted into drug abuse treatment, almost two-thirds report that they suffered some form of abuse during childhood (Swan, 1998).



Research on persons convicted of violent crimes also finds that severe forms of abuse were experienced in childhood. According to a study by the Institute of Justice, those who were abused or neglected during childhood were at an increased risk of being arrested for criminal behavior as juveniles and as adults. They were also, as juveniles or adults, at an increased risk for being arrested for a form of violent crime. It is not uncommon for parents who suffered some form of abuse as children to turn around and abuse their own child. An estimated one-third of children who suffer from abuse or neglect early on will engage in future abuse of their own children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information gateway, 2006; Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007; Widom, 1989).

Difficult for therapists and researchers is the fact that, due to the varying contexts, definitions, and characteristics of child abuse, there is no one syndrome that can be applied as a diagnosis. More than 50% of child sexual abuse victims meet at least partial criteria for a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder however, this figure lacks reliability due to the insensitivity of the existing measurements to child developmental characteristics (Saywitz, Mannarino, Berliner, & Cohen, 2000). Desiring to use evidence based models, therapists are met with conventional treatments that have not been validated to address the specific needs of the abused child. Research on treatment efficacy is being conducted in greater speed than ever before and with significant progress however, variation in cases and diagnosis make study of the efficacy of treatment models a challenging task (Saywitz, Mannarino, Berliner, & Cohen, 2000; Wilson, 2012).

Abuse-specific models of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) have been found to be probably the most efficacious in treatment of different groups of abuse victims, and are becoming increasingly favored as the method to use for child abuse victims (Saywitz,

Mannarino, Berliner, & Cohen, 2000; Wilson, 2012). Specific models include Trauma-Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, and Abused-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT). The efficacy of treatment models will depend on the mode of treatment, the level of care, the risk factors of the child, and the characteristics of the abuse. More research needs to be done on implementation of multiple evidence based practice models to give professionals the option of matching the most effective treatment with the child and family needs. Research suggests that used in combination with psychoeducation, prevention awareness and reevaluation over time, abuse-specific CBT may benefit the child and prevent further victimization and problems later in childhood or adulthood (Saywitz, Mannarino, Berliner, & Cohen, 2000, Wilson, 2012).

Child abuse prevention efforts have been expanding with public awareness of the issue of child maltreatment. Interventions including new parent services, home-visits, parenting education classes, parent support groups, family resource centers, and crisis intervention services are increasingly available to families at risk for physical abuse and neglect. Additionally, programs to help children protect themselves from sexual abuse, teach them the difference between good and bad touching, explain children's rights, and encourage reporting are used to empower the children themselves (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Portwood, 2006). Most recently, the power of prevention is being placed in the hands of the community. Social media is illuminating the issue and the responsibility of reducing risk, reporting, and providing support is being placed upon professionals, educators, family members, neighbors, and friends.

### **C. Offender Behavior and Treatment**

Characteristics of child maltreatment offenders may be factors that are demographic, familial, educational, or biological in nature. Researchers attempting to investigate causes of child abuse, find that there is no one single characteristic that will explain why abusers offend (Portwood, 2006). Parental characteristics more closely associated with physical abuse or neglect include; substance abuse and lack of involvement in the community. Additionally, abusive parents are often young and single, lack self-esteem, lack empathy, and do not understand child developmental stages. These parents may have anger problems, stress management problems, poor parenting skills, and a lack of social skills. Characteristic of sexual abuse offenders are the male gender, antisocial tendencies, lack of impulse control, and deviant sexual arousal. Family dysfunction, marital conflict, and experiencing abuse are also risk factors for offending behavior (Portwood, 2006; Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007). Research does not pinpoint a specific trait common to all offenders however, the characteristics that place offenders at risk help researchers and professionals to develop treatment and prevention programs, which may reduce a child's risk of victimization.

Recent prevention programming is placing the focus on changing the social system to improve the circumstances for families at risk. Programs are being implemented to educate parents on child rearing, to offer support to families at risk, and to help with job skills or an education. There is not a foolproof method of eliminating poverty however, and the risk factors that are associated with it will remain (Portwood, 2006).

Treatment for child sexual abuse offenders under modern standards is based on cognitive behavioral models. These models however, differ in modality from other abuse-specific CBT program models. Treatment for sexual abuse offenders is usually very vigorous and employs techniques particular to the undesirable characteristics causing sexual offending and involves the

important feature of recidivism control or relapse prevention (Beggs & Grace, 2011). More research is needed to address the relationship between treatment program completion and recidivism, but some studies show a reduction in recidivism on reduced risk offenders and juvenile offenders (Beggs & Grace, 2011; Efta-Breitbach & Freeman, 2004).

Again, social media is increasingly opening the door to the prevalence of child abuse offenses and the responsibility of communities to educate themselves, be aware, and to report any suspicions. As the nation has heard or read most recently in the Jerry Sandusky – Penn State sexual abuse case, to turn a blind eye or to fail to report a witnessed act of abuse can mean there will be more victims, victimization for a longer duration, and trouble for the non-reporting bystander (Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan, 2012).

#### **D. CAPTA and the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act**

The scope of child abuse expands across the nation. The federal role in the prevention of child maltreatment includes the enactment of The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), originally enacted in 1974, and amended most recently in 2010. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, works on legislation, amendments, regulation, and implementation of programs involved in child welfare, including those related to CAPTA and its reauthorizations (Samuels, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, 2012).

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in its initial enactment in 1974, provided federal definitions of abuse, outlined the federal role and the role of the state in the protection of children, and the prevention and treatment of abuse. It also mandated the reporting, investigating, and responding to abuse by state systems (Samuels, 2011).

In 2003, improvements were made to CAPTA, the Adoption Opportunities Act, the Abandoned Infants Assistance Act, and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act. This new legislation was called the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act (Keeping Children and Families Safe Act, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, 2012). The amended act reauthorized CAPTA until 2008 and provided funds for increased longitudinal research. States were given added State grant eligibility provisions requiring state focus on providing for the needs of families and children, including referral services, adoption program implementation, CPS procedure, drug exposed priority, and CPS legal training.

In 2010, CAPTA was reauthorized yet again to increase state laws and programs, grants, reports, services, and training (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, 2012). The Nation's response to child maltreatment is not waning. Efforts are being made on an annual basis to improve existing legislation, increase reporting, and to protect our nation's greatest resource, the children.

## **E. Public and Social Media**

Prior to the 1970's, when CAPTA was enacted, child abuse was treated in much the same way as domestic violence, with silence. Following Henry Kempe's article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on the "battered child syndrome" in 1962, and the impending need for legislation, public awareness of the issue of child abuse was heightened (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Portwood, 2006; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). The 1980s again brought increased public awareness of child abuse with the focus on research, interventions, and prevention programs. The result of this research brought about an increased emphasis on primary prevention methods to provide support

for families, new mothers, and children, including home-based interventions and educational programs designed to help children protect themselves from child abuse and to teach them how to report (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Portwood, 2006).

The prevention efforts of today continue to be based on the still new but increasing amount of research on the topic, and involve the collective efforts of many disciplines including the medical community, law enforcement, advocacy centers, schools, non-profit organizations, and concerned communities. Social media and public awareness is one aspect of child abuse prevention that is growing rapidly. With the increase in child advocacy centers and non-profit organizations dedicated to the prevention of child abuse, (e.g. Darkness to Light, Stop it Now!, Children's Trust Fund, Prevent Child Abuse America, Blue Ribbons for KIDS, and Awareness to Action) comes an increase in advocates and professionals dedicated to informing the public on the issue. Though more research needs to be done on the effectiveness of public awareness and social media, it remains that child abuse can happen in any home, with children of any age, and advocates agree on the importance of the role of adults in prevention (Darkness to Light, 2012; Blue Ribbons for Kids, 2005; MMWR, 2001; Portwood, 2006). Agencies that provide services to children and families can benefit both the community and themselves by educating the public on the topic of abuse and providing information and resources on where to turn for help (McCall, 1983; Children's Service Society of Wisconsin, Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin, 2012). Social and public media exists in many forms including such mass media venues as television, radio, billboards, press releases, websites, and social networking sites. More targeted media venues include such things as magazines, brochures, posters, and books. Not only are organizations and advocates for children able to reach a larger audience than by any other means, but they are able

to reach them quickly and with greater impact and momentum. Social networking sites allow news stories regarding abuse, impending child safety legislation, and child abuse prevention training to reach a nationwide audience or a targeted audience at the touch of a button. Additionally, in many venues, public comments and opinions are allowed, providing a more powerful message to abusers of behavior that society finds unacceptable.

Research suggests that there are barriers to adopting social media campaigns that organizations should be aware of when in the development phase. The recent social media movement in child abuse prevention is encouraging organizations to embrace social technology and use it to the advantage of the organization and its cause however, resistance to change and a lack of leadership can slow the opportunity (Silverman, 2012). Lack of knowledge or understanding of social media technology, fear, and lack of prepared leadership were reported to be the biggest barriers. In addition, it was not clear in organizations, which department or employee should be responsible for leadership of social media technology (Silverman, 2012). There are an increasing number of businesses in the social media field that are focusing efforts on assisting non-profit organizations in their social media campaign efforts however, cost is many times an issue with hiring outside counsel.

There is also literature to suggest the negative side of child abuse publicity and the social media wildfire. Goddard and Saunders (2001) cautions on some of the unresolved issues surrounding child victims in the media. One specific concern is the fact that in many cases, the abuse that occurs within a family does not necessarily mean the end of the relationship between the parent and child, for example. There should be sensitivity in such cases however, social media is sometimes difficult to restrain and may exacerbate a child victims feelings of self-blame and guilt. Public media also brings with it, the potential for serious error. Mistakes in the

identity of offenders, or mistakenly allowing comments that allude to the minor child's identity can also be erroneous enough to cause great harm to parties. Goddard and Saunders (2001) also suggest that the media portrayal of social service workers can serve an injustice if they are deemed either too lenient in a case or alternatively too much of a bully.

As will be explained in greater detail in following sections, there are many organizations across the nation, and ones exclusive to the state of Wisconsin, whose efforts in child abuse prevention include the use of public campaigns and social media initiatives to create awareness, educate, express intolerance of abuse, and support policy and legislation. This movement is still relatively new and research is just beginning to evaluate prevention methods, community efforts, and efficacy of programs and initiatives. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to review these particular initiatives with the goal of providing recommendations for an ideal social media campaign designed for the prevention of child abuse, including optimal media venues, messages that will elicit the greatest response, and organizations that are best suited to its use.



### **SECTION III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to statistics presented in the Child Maltreatment Annual Reports: Reports from the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems (NCANDS), in 2009, the greatest percentage of perpetrators inflicting abuse upon a child more than one time were parents (80.9%). Biological parents comprised 84.7% of those parental abuse cases. It was reported that the majority of unique abusers were in the age range of 20 to 49 years. Lastly, 53.8 of those unique abusers were women (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Maltreatment, 2009). It is difficult to imagine a parent inflicting damage on his or her own offspring, yet it happens in alarming numbers. Examination of the theoretical applications of the strain theories, social learning and social control theories, and routine activity theory provides a deeper understanding of the processes underlying the abusive behavior of these offenders.

#### **A. Strain Theories**

Many of the child abuse prevention efforts today are based on the link between societal inequality and injustice and the widespread occurrence of child abuse. Child abuse occurs across all socioeconomic levels, however research consistently shows an increased risk for physical abuse and neglect among the economically disadvantaged (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Portwood, 2006). The risk for child physical abuse and neglect is reportedly higher for children living in poverty, living among drug abusers, born to young parents, and living in homes where domestic abuse is a problem. In disadvantaged communities, the stresses faced by parents, especially single parents, and the anger or frustration that is caused by societal issues can be taken out on innocent children as the only available target. A recent study conducted by researchers at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, reported an increase in serious child abuse that required hospitalization, with a

trend of higher home foreclosures and mortgage delinquencies (Wood, et al., 2012). Many prevention efforts are therefore aimed at improving economic conditions for families, providing parenting support/education, home-visits and support for new mothers, educational options, and providing resources for financial, housing, and health care assistance.

## **B. Social learning Theory**

Social learning theory supplies an appropriate theoretical context for the subject of child abuse while explaining some of the variables that have been discovered in the link between abuse and offending behavior. Akers' (1994) theory of social learning leads its field in the explanation of the all-important question of "why?" when studying criminal behavior. Strong in empirical validity, researched within a wide array of other social and behavioral models, and updated to include the most current findings and associations, social learning theory expands on differential association and behavioral learning theories in an effort to provide a thorough explanation of the reasoning behind engaging in either offending or conforming behaviors. Social learning theory's basic conceptual assertion is that early in life, learning occurs through observing or imitating models of individuals significant to the child's environment (Prather & Golden, 2009). Offending and antisocial behaviors are learned through family structures and the quality of parent-child relationships. A complex system of familial and environmental factors work together in the learning and reinforcing of aggressive or antisocial behaviors, which can lead to delinquency or later adult criminality including the abuse of one's own children.

Recent research studies (Widom, 1989; Widom & Maxfield, 2001; Huesmann, L., et. al., 2002) have shown a link between the breakdown of these important initial relationships by abuse, neglect, or specific aggressive or inconsistent parenting practices, and the potential to

offend. Poor parental practices, severe punishing methods, and various forms of abuse are found to weaken the parent child relationship that is so important in the development, and maintenance of conforming behaviors. These negative behaviors, within intimate units, responsible for modeling definitions unfavorable to law violation (Sutherland & Cressey, 1960), are examples of factors that create an excess of favorable definitions for abusive behavior.

Research conducted by Ireland and Smith (2008) on the link between living in homes where domestic violence is witnessed and later criminality lends support to Akers' social support theory as well. Those children who had grown up in families where severe partner-violence was witnessed were found in adolescence to be at a greater risk for violence in their own relationships, but also at a greater risk of violent criminal behavior (Ireland & Smith, 2008; Portwood, 2006). Though actual physical or sexual abuse had not taken place in most cases, the breaking down of the initial family relationships found here and the presentation of negative models to imitate, describes how differential association works within the early framework of a child's life, to have an effect on their behavior in future relationships and criminal offenses (Akers, 1994).

### **C. Social Control Theory**

As with social learning theory, the premise of social control theories is the importance of parental bonds early in life that shape the future of a child's behavior, motivations, morals, and beliefs. Hirschi's (1969) Social bond theory lays out four elements, attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief; that influence conformity or restraint from criminal activity. When these initially important parental or familial bonds are broken, as would be the case in a situation of child abuse or neglect, the potentiality for later offending exists.

When reviewing the studies on child abuse and subsequent delinquency and adult criminal behavior, (Widom, 1989; Widom & Maxfield, 2001; Huesmann, L., et. al., 2002) we see that when child abuse or neglect has occurred, the element of attachment is harmed and moral restraints are altered. A child's family is his source of attachment in that the parent is the closest available model for creating a learning environment for behaviors, which are socially acceptable (Wiatrowski, et al., 1981). If a child is physically abused or emotionally degraded and belittled, his or her element of commitment would not tend toward conformity, but rather he is not risking any loss of parental support by engaging in deviant behavior. Involvement is not clearly understood in abuse cases, but the presumption would be in cases of neglect specifically, involvement in activities for these children would be at a minimum. The last element, belief, as explained by Hirschi (1969), assumes a system of common beliefs or norms that tend to lean a person toward criminal behavior or toward law-abiding behavior. In the instances of child abuse and maltreatment, the basic value system learned through the family bonds, does not facilitate a moral belief system that would lead a child toward behaviors other than what they are experiencing themselves. This leads to the potential of an abused child to treat his/her own children in the same manner that they learned children were to be treated.

Prevention efforts today also stress the importance of breaking the intergenerational cycle of abuse. Utilizing public service announcements and the media and by strengthening parental capacity using parent and/or child therapy, support groups, home-visit programs, community support, and/or parent education classes, family violence can be diminished or eliminated (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). By providing for the safety of one child early on, professional efforts assure greater protection for the children of future generations of a family.

#### **D. Routine Activity Theory**

The fact remains that the overwhelming majority of child abusers are family members who reside in the home, close family friends, or caregivers (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). The concepts of routine activities theory including offender motivation, child availability and absent guardianship, as well as, “routine activities” are utilized here to explain the victimization of young children. The consequences of abuse in childhood can lead far in to adulthood and can lead to the perpetration of abuse on one’s own children. With this information, we can seek to find ways that under this theory, early detection techniques and prevention models can be used, limiting the continuation of the cycle of abuse.

Whereas children from non-abusive families see the home as a place of safety and comfort, child victims are left with a threatening and dehumanizing view of home. Utilizing the contexts of routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), an explanation of what puts these young children at risk for being victimized in the first place can be analyzed. The simple nature of early childhood, puts children in close proximity to potential adult and adolescent offenders, reduces guardianship, namely additional close family members responsible for care and affection, and limits authoritative intervention by being in the home environment. Study of the theoretical components point to routine activity theory as a potential model for early childhood victimization.

Cohen and Felson’s (1979) routine activity theory asserts that there are three elements that must coexist at the same place and at the same time for crime to occur. These elements are “motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians” (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 434). It is argued that all three elements must be present, and the lack of even one will cease to produce a direct-contact predatory crime. The theoretical premises issued by Cohen and

Felson (1979) are based mainly on crimes such as theft. Routine activities are those activities such as work, school, or regular extra-curricular activities. The working definitions of suitable targets refer to material property of great value, little weight, and ease of removal. The absence of capable guardians refers to such things as homes that are left unoccupied when owners are engaged in routine activities.

When trends in people's patterns of activity were analyzed alongside American crime rates over more than a decade, statistically significant relationships were noted (Cohen & Felson, 1979). As more women went to college and entered the workforce, leaving the home, more crimes were committed. As more people left on vacations, leaving their homes, more crimes were committed, and as electronics (suitable targets) became lighter and more portable over the years, the rates of theft increased. None of these facts or statistics, have explained any relationship to early child abuse, so how is it that the theory of routine activities would provide an applicable model?

The theory was applied initially to the risk-inflating lifestyle problems rather than to environmental conditions, which Reid and Sullivan (2009) address as a more suited application to the study of child victimization such as abuse. Child abuse is a direct contact predatory crime if you first consider the child a suitable target. Cohen and Felson (1979) explained traits of suitable targets as something valued, without the physical ability to resist, and access and visibility. Children are smaller, they are weaker and more vulnerable, they are dependent upon the adults for their care, they are unlikely to resist if even aware of what is happening to them and are easily controlled by manipulation or threat (Reid & Sullivan 2009). An offender preconceived to be motivated by things such as sexual deviancies, strain, learned aggression, etc. sees value in the child as something that brings pleasure or eases strain. At home, children, the

suitable target, are easily accessible. Motivated offender and suitable child target are at home. No criminal act will occur, unless a capable guardian for that child is absent (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Previous analysis of the trends of routine patterns of activities suggested that more women were entering college and taking jobs outside of the home. Naturally, what would ensue is a caregiver for the child would be responsible for her watch, often times alone, and without the presence of the capable guardian.

Motivated offender and suitable target are at home and capable guardian is at work. All three components “converge in space and time...” and a crime such as child sexual abuse occurs (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 434). Since the abuse occurs in the home, there is also the limitation of police involvement as a potential guardian protector. A lack of cohesion in many of today’s family situations allows for less parental supervision and therefore a greater risk for victimization as well (Reid & Sullivan, 2010). Though great strides have been made toward police intervention in harmful family situations, there is still a hesitation involved in arrest and enforcement (Karmen, 2010).

In order to develop models of protection for children, rather than rely on the rehabilitation or the desisting of offender behavior, we need to address not why victims become criminals, but why they become victims in the first place. Routine activity theory supports the idea that children are at risk for abuse in locations where they lack a capable guardian. This may occur in a school setting, in a church, at a friend’s house, but in most instances, the abuse is occurring at home. It has been stressed that to prevent child sexual victimization, we must educate the child on things such as “good touching versus bad touching.” This is an important step to take in prevention; however, the responsibility in protection is not that of a small child. Adults are responsible for many acts that keep our children safe, such as holding their hand when

crossing the street, buckling them into car seats, storing medications out of reach, so why would we leave it up to a child to protect their self from abuse (Darkness to Light, 2010)?

Prevention models based on adult education of abuse, public awareness and media campaigns, school based self-protection curricula, home visits, and quality community-based afterschool programs would appear to be consistent with the notion of routine activity. Adult caregivers, teachers, and community members need to be educated on the signs of abuse and the ways to report abuse. Children armed with information on what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate behavior, and who to talk to if they are fearful or hurt, have a better chance of protecting themselves from further abuse. Effective monitoring of at-risk home situations can assure increased safety in the home environment. Quality childcare or after school programming staffed with capable guardians gives children a safe escape from locations of abuse and removes an element of the routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979).

Evidence has shown that the use of abuse media campaigns may help to raise public awareness about prevention of maltreatment, and alter behavior patterns of abusing adults (Drazen, Guenther, & Hansen, 2009; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). Media such as brief television announcements, billboards, radio public service announcements, websites, brochures, posters, educational materials, billboards, posters, web sites, and print ads, reach out to the public creating awareness of a serious issue. Awareness creates curiosity and encourages learning. The increased public attention may assist somewhat in changing behaviors of offenders, though more research needs to be done on its effects (Drazen, et al., 2009; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010). Existing media campaigns and initiatives are discussed in detail in the following section.



## **SECTION IV: EXAMINATION OF EXISTING SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS**

Look in your newspaper today, log onto Facebook, or turn on the local news and the likelihood is that you will see at least one case of child maltreatment or neglect in your area. High profile cases, such as the Jerry Sandusky –Penn State sexual abuse case reach every newscast and newspaper across the nation and permeate the internet in the form of news, blogs, comments, posts, and images, while other cases may just hit the local newspaper or telecast. It is not likely that you can escape the reality that it is happening around us, every minute of every day. It is read, it is heard, and it is noticed however, is there a commitment to action? Since the 1970's and the enactment of CAPTA, there has been a significant increase in the presence of organizations dedicated to the safety of children. There are governmental organizations, hotlines, non-profits, community projects, advocacy centers, and faith-based programs. The programs may site slightly differing missions and goals, but essentially, they all seek to ensure the basic rights of children to lead a life that is physically, mentally and emotionally free from abuse.

In the mid 1970's, Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) and the Ad Council developed a series of public service announcements that included media venues such as television, radio, billboards, and print advertising. The campaign was found to increase awareness of child abuse as a societal issue and to decrease the use of corporal punishment and verbal aggression as discipline (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011). Since then, effective media campaigns have been designed and utilized to raise awareness of issues such as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), shaken baby syndrome, and child abuse. The trends in media for non-profits and organizations aimed at child abuse prevention have evolved and are increasingly including social media (e.g. Facebook, twitter, websites, YouTube, blogs,

Flickr, etc.) in addition to mass media (television, radio, magazines, and newspapers) and targeted communications (brochures, posters, booklets, etc.) (McCall, 1983; Nonprofit Tech 2.0, 2012).

Social media campaigns can serve multiple purposes for organizations. Social media allows organizations to develop an increasingly recognizable logo and to communicate available services and resources (McCall, 1983). Additionally, organizations can develop a following of strong supporters and advocates who both receive the organization's media and send it bottom-up to others in need of information or in an effort to gain additional support for something that is important to them (Thackeray & Neiger, 2009). An organization's use of the multi-directional communication model of sending information top-down, horizontally, and bottoms-up in a relatively instantaneous format, quickly increases visibility, awareness, and support. Social media sites also provide a self-preservation tool, making it easier now to conduct fundraising campaigns, via a *Donate* button, that have the potential to reach a larger pool of donors than ever before.

Social media development and involvement require time and dedication. Non-profit organizations either are beginning to delegate social media responsibilities to existing employees, or are hiring social media professionals to manage the many potential aspects of their campaign. Social media experts recommend that non-profit organizations hire a professional due to their knowledge, experience, and ease of use with social media tools and the full-time and often over-time requirements for effective management of media networks (Nonprofit Tech 2.0, 2012). There are many non-profit organizations currently using social media and there will be many more in the coming years. Each of these organizations may have the same or similar visions and goals, and many will effectively collaborate and align their resources, however, others will be in direct competition for support and funding. Optimizing awareness of an organizations services, goals, and efforts through a well-developed and promoted media campaign will be increasingly essential to preserving the organization and increasing its potential to prevent child abuse and create social change.

## **A. Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund**

The Children's Trust Fund of Wisconsin, created in 1983, is affiliated with the larger National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, which provides ongoing research reviews of the latest advances in the field of child abuse prevention. Specifically the Wisconsin Child Trust Fund organization is committed to supporting the child abuse and neglect prevention services and programs in Wisconsin area communities. It is their belief that all children should have the opportunity to grow up in a nurturing, violence free environment and have an equal opportunity to attain their full potential (Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 2012).

The organization developed a 2010-2015 Strategic Plan, which was approved in April 2010. The plan outlines five specific goals of the organization in the prevention of child abuse: "Convene and unite key partners around a shared prevention agenda; identify, develop, and promote best practices in child abuse prevention; promote adult and community responsibility to protect children from abuse and neglect; advocate for public policy that reflects the Children's Trust Fund vision and mission; and to ensure the Children's Trust Fund is a high quality and high performing agency" (Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 2012). Specific media related goals include marketing the Children's Trust Fund name and logo to create awareness of its presence as a provider of high quality programs and prevention initiatives, publicizing and promoting new promising trends in the field of child abuse prevention, identifying public education and social marketing efforts that are most effective in Wisconsin, and creating awareness of the organization among legislators and representatives and actively promoting public policy (Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 2012).

The Children's Trust Fund currently utilizes many social media venues including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, and more to reach out to individuals, families,

professionals, groups, and organizations. Organizations such as The Children's Trust Fund and the others listed in this section, are now able to gain support and to accept online donations from supporters. The social media sites not only create awareness of the organization's name and mission, but they also lend themselves to providing online education and training, enlisting volunteers, promoting and gaining support for policy reform, and partnering with other organizations with similar goals. Also affiliated with The Children's Trust Fund are the organizations, Blue Ribbons for Kids and The Celebrate Children Foundation (Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 2012). Investing in social media, managing it effectively, and using what it has to offer is important in an age where non-profit organizations are popping up daily and are competing to create awareness of their services and to secure funding for their efforts.

## **B. Stop It Now!**

In 2001, The Surgeon General, David Satcher, issued a national Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior, citing child sexual abuse as one of a number of public health issues that are sexual-related (Moser, 2011). Additionally, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2004) and the World Health Organization (WHO) also deemed this violence, a public health issue. Qualifying the issue as a public health problem is the fact that sexual abuse is damaging to a child's emotional and physical health and there are millions of victims (Moser, 2011; Peckover & Smith, 2011; National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation, 2012).

The Stop It Now! organization, a comprehensive and multidimensional program implemented in several states and countries, is based on the guiding principles that children have a right to safety and well-being, and that sexual abuse is a social problem that is preventable in a public health framework (Stop It Now, 2008-2012). A pilot study of the program researched

whether sexual offenders would reach out for help if there were a trusted outlet, whether an increase of discussion about sexual abuse among adults could be achieved, whether adults could be educated on how to prevent abuse, and whether support of abusers to stop, would make a difference. The study found that if adults were provided with a confidential phone line for sexual abuse related assistance, they would use it (Moser, 2011). In the Stop It Now! Report #5 (2000), Vermont reported that 657 calls were made to the hotline in the first 4 years, including calls from abusers and those who knew a victim or an abuser. Males comprised 32% of the calls, which exceeds the average 10% male call-in for other hotlines.

On a statewide level, the Stop It Now! model for child abuse prevention was recommended for Wisconsin by a workgroup formed from Governor Jim Doyle's *Summit to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect: A State Call to Action*. When it first launched in 2007, its main targets were Milwaukee and Marathon counties (Stop It Now! Wisconsin, 2012). Funded by The Children's Trust Fund, mentioned previously, and the Child Abuse Prevention Fund (Children's Hospital and Health Systems of Wisconsin), Stop It Now! Wisconsin began a successful radio campaign and participated in 13 media interviews. In just one year, the campaign recorded 5749 website hits and 41 calls to its helpline. It ended the affiliation with Stop It Now! in 2008 and continued a media initiative under Awareness to Action (a2a) Wisconsin. Awareness to Action-Wisconsin utilizes the Darkness to Light; *Stewards of Children* program detailed later and like its affiliates is focused on helping adults take action, along with their communities, in the prevention of child sexual abuse (a2a, 2010). Awareness to Action is a program of the Children's Service Society of Wisconsin and is funded by the Children's Hospital and Health System's Child Abuse Prevention Fund and the Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund. Awareness to Action encourages adults to get involved by becoming a *Steward of Children*,

becoming familiar with the resources in their community, by volunteering with the local sexual assault center, and by facing those who are abusive and urging them to stop, get help, and stand accountable (a2a, 2010).

### **C. Darkness to Light (D2L)**

The non-profit organization, Darkness to Light (D2L), was created in 2000. Its mission is to use public awareness and education to reduce child sexual abuse (Darkness to Light, 2012). Social media and public awareness are keys to reaching more people, educating more people, and eventually changing the way in which our society protects and cares for our children. Empowering adults to talk about childhood sexual abuse, to learn more about it, and to be involved in the prevention of it, is at the heart of D2L. The existence of the first D2L media campaign was launched in June of 2001 thanks to generous community support, and the award winning campaign has continued, providing CNN public service announcements, magazine advertisements, documentaries, educational materials, and worldwide training programs. By illuminating the incomprehensible statistics regarding child abuse, coupled with the detrimental and many times life-long effects, D2L reaches out to adults to take responsibility for the protection of our children (Darkness to Light, 2012).

Media campaigns launched by Darkness to Light include “Keep Their Futures Bright” which creates awareness about the fact that child sexual abuse offenders are most often someone close to the child and their family and someone that they have put their trust in (Darkness to Light, 2012). Viewers are given resources for child safety and sexual abuse prevention tools. Public service announcements (PSAs) were created to address the sad, but true, statistics of child abuse (e.g. “Too Many Children”) and to depict real-life stories of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (e.g. “Faces”). Commercials presented the shocking reality that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in

6 boys will have been sexually abused before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. By using the commercials to offer the tool “7 Steps to Protecting our Children,” D2L hopes that awareness and prevention involvement will spread (Darkness to Light, 2012).

Social media initiatives for D2L are adding to the momentum of the organization’s efforts. Darkness to Light offers on its website, many opportunities for involvement. Via social media, there are educational tools for parents, individuals, educators, and organizations. Its *7 Steps to Protecting our Children from Sexual Abuse* is an available tool that is designed to educate responsible adults about child sexual abuse prevention. The site also offers *Stewards of Children* training workshops that are, either facilitated at locations across the nation, or available online. Facilitator training workshops are also held across the nation to add more and more facilitators, thus increasing the presence of D2L, increasing awareness of child sexual abuse, and educating a society about an issue that affects 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys prior to the age of 18 (Darkness to Light, 2012).

The Stewards of Children curriculum has been evaluated seven times. The pilot evaluation was completed by (477) participants and results indicated that there was a significant gain (36%) in knowledge and attitudes about childhood sexual abuse. Two months after training, the participants showed an increase in behaviors related to child abuse prevention (Darkness to Light, 2012). Others studies revealed that utilization of the media campaign may be useful in public education so that communities can develop ongoing prevention programs. It was noted that additional community outreach in addition to the media campaigns may also be beneficial in improving strategies for child sexual abuse prevention. Research also shows the same positive results for the online curricula as for the in-person facilitated program (Darkness to Light, 2012).

As with sites of other organizations, D2L offers many educational tools, materials, and curricula for sale, with proceeds benefitting the organization. Donations to the organization are accepted online as well. The opportunities available through the Darkness to Light social media initiative are vast and have the potential to reach more viewers, educate more individuals, and enlist more advocates than with any other method. D2L is a firm believer in the responsibility of the adult to keep children safe. Through the education and awareness offered to adults through D2L's social media campaign, an increasing number of adults are armed with the skills needed to detect abuse and the knowledge of what to do in situations where abuse is suspected.

In Wisconsin, there are currently 40 *Stewards of Children* facilitators in Wisconsin and that number is growing. These facilitators are able to hold training sessions in their communities and surrounding areas in order to increase the number of adults armed with the skills and resources needed to detect potential abuse and to report to the proper people. As of today 3,318 people in Wisconsin have been trained to be *Stewards of Children* (Darkness to Light, 2012).

#### **D. Federal Program Involvement**

Child abuse is recognized as being an issue of national importance. It is recognized that the health of our society is reflected in how its most valued members are treated. Nationwide, billions of dollars are spent on programs dedicated to child welfare however; the problem still exists in staggering numbers. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2010), there are an estimated 408,425 children in foster care in the United States because they cannot live safely in their own family. This number was over a half million in 2000 (DeLay, 2000). In Washington D.C., important steps are being taken through legislation and the allocation of grants and funds toward increasing the safety of our nation's most important resources.



Since the 1974 enactment of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), there has been an increasing amount of legislation designed toward the intervention and prevention of child abuse. As seen in the timeline (Figure A1), there has been a recent surge in legislation with an increased awareness of the problem as a public health issue (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Administration for Children & Families, 2012).

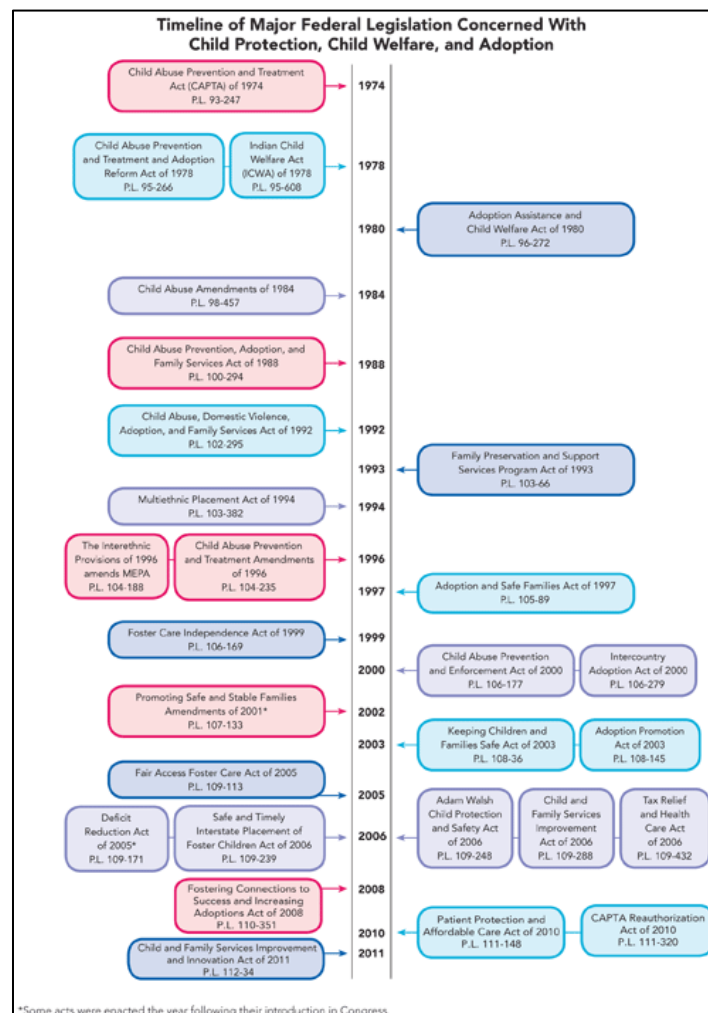


Figure A1. Timeline of Major Federal Legislation Concerned With Child Protection, Child Welfare and Adoption. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Administration for Children & Families, 2012).

Much of this legislation provides for the annual funding of research and demonstration grants, training and technical assistance agreements, and longitudinal research contracts (Brodowski, Flanzer, Nolan, Shafer, & Kaye, 2007). Additionally, funding is allocated for initiatives in foster care program improvement, and state programs providing for the needs of families and children such as referral services, adoption program implementation, CPS procedure, drug exposed priority, and CPS legal training (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, 2012).

It is evident that no single approach is going to guarantee the elimination of child maltreatment in our country. Despite the increased legislation, funding and subsequent increase in best practice identification methods, the complexities of the issue and the realization that what may work in one area, may not work in another, leads us to an even greater need for study of "what works?" and "where?". According to the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (2012), in addition to research that can be used as a catalyst for social change, public awareness of the problem of child abuse and knowledge of prevention strategies is an important action step in the prevention strategy. Well-tested messages expressed through social media and other creative technical outlets of influence can aid in increasing understanding of the need for social change regarding abuse. Many of the social media efforts are still funded primarily through donations to the supporting non-profit organizations and the increase in their use in the coming years will require additional necessary support.

The increased enthusiasm demonstrated by child abuse prevention organizations, such as Stop It Now!, Darkness to Light, Awareness to Action, The Children's Trust Fund, and others, along with the determination of public policy advocates is promising. In the next section,

recommendations will be made for ideal social media campaign components, based on existing programs, theory, and research suggestions. It is hoped that these recommendations may be used as guidelines for the development or improvement of campaigns used in the prevention of child abuse in Wisconsin and in similar locales.

## **SECTION V: RECOMMENDATIONS**

No single approach to child abuse prevention is going to be effective in eliminating all forms of child maltreatment or assuring that all children live in an equally loving and nurturing family. The complexities surrounding child abuse prevention, intervention, and research involve strong variations in theory, contexts, definitions, and characteristics of abuse. In Wisconsin, what works to address child physical abuse in downtown Milwaukee or Madison, may not work to address the issue of child sexual abuse in more rural, farming communities, and vice versa. The development of an ideal social media campaign therefore requires at minimum, careful analysis of theory, participants, target population, cost, resources, available research, and potential for success. The program must be broad enough to meet the need to create awareness and knowledge for all, yet be accessible and tailored to the personal involvement of communities, organizations, and individuals.

Programs such as the ones detailed earlier (e.g. Darkness to Light, Stop It Now!, and The Children's Trust Fund) are comprehensive and include primary preventative efforts including awareness, education, and advocacy, as well as, intervention efforts designed to provide resources to those who have already suffered abuse and to those that have offended and seek help. In a theoretical framework, primary prevention efforts are of upmost importance. Education and awareness of positive parenting skills and non-aggressive discipline help to establish a positive parent-child relationship, provides early modeling of good parental behaviors, and a reason to later engage in similar positive parenting roles with their own children (Akers, 1994, Hirschi, 1969). Research shows that a multidisciplinary approach, such as the ones

that these organizations employ, is necessary to handle the complex nature of the child abuse issue, yet even then; there is much societal change that needs to take place if significant statistical reductions in abuse are to be seen at a statewide or nationwide level. The target aim of social media initiatives is to increase primary prevention strategies or to prevent child abuse before there is a need to heal a victim or punish an offender (Pollard, 2006; Rheingold, et al, 2007).

Social media campaigns dedicated to child abuse prevention are designed to increase public awareness, educate, elicit support and funding, and provide resources for reporting and intervention (Darkness to Light, 2012; Rheingold et. al., 2007). If one considers the staggering 61,763 reports of child abuse in 2010 in Wisconsin, and the realization that there are far more cases of actual abuse due to non-reporting, the goal of social media campaigns is on target to make a difference (London, et. al, 2005; Hodson & Skeen, 1987). Creating awareness of child abuse as a public health issue, defining organizational rules limiting one-on-one child engagement, educating viewers using definitions and signs of abuse, and providing a clear and available option for reporting, are steps that may increase reporting (including self-reporting) and/or minimize future instances of child abuse.

This section will first look at social media in an attempt to discern which format reaches the largest target audience at the time of this writing. Next, messages will be addressed to describe what words and/or ideas motivate people with the greatest call to action. Lastly, discussion will revolve around the various national, state, and community organizations that may achieve the greatest success and rewards from social media initiatives.

#### **A. Media Venues Reaching Largest Audience**

In this age of information technology, what used to have the greatest reach and effect on populations is not necessarily going to have the same effect today. Television is still a widely utilized form of mass media communication. The visual projection of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) is still able to reach a wide and variable population base, including many of those at risk for being involved in abusive situations, with the potential to change viewpoints and perhaps behaviors. Research shows an increase in knowledge from PSA's following exposure, however it is recommended that repeated exposure and additional education would increase knowledge retention and changes in primary preventative behaviors (Rheingold, et. al., 2007). Television and radio PSA spots, in themselves, are very brief and cannot offer the in depth education and services that are available through the combination of other media venues, including the increasingly popular social media options.

Targeted media such as brochures and pamphlets, books, and materials are informative, but are often designated for a particular population of limited scope, such as those who have already suffered abuse. Targeted media can be distributed in medical offices, schools, advocacy centers, and social service departments for example. Targeted media for CSA has been shown to increase knowledge of CSA in readers and may also produce more primary preventative behavior in CSA prevention (Rheingold, et. al., 2007). Organizational web pages is yet another distribution venue that can increase the readership of such targeted materials.

Awareness of risk factors of offender behavior is important in deciding who to target and how they will be targeted. In 2010, in Wisconsin 83% of abusers were primary caregivers of child victims. Risk for caregiver offending include such factors as being young and single, having a lack of self-esteem, possessing poor parenting skills, having a lack of knowledge of child development, lacking in community involvement, and often the presence of economic

stressors or strains such as unemployment or home foreclosure (Portwood, 2006; Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007; Wood et. al, 2012). That, coupled with the fact that it is possible that their own childhood experiences may have included abuse, neglect, or poor parenting and, as is explained in a theoretical context with Aker's (1994) social learning and Hirschi's (1969) social control theories, gives them limited basis for good parenting or non-offending behaviors. Therefore, it makes sense to reach out via a venue that will catch the interest of young parents and offer such services as parenting advice, education on child developmental milestones and positive parenting techniques, and resources for state and local economic, housing, employment, and educational assistance. Research suggests that young people typically acquire 51.7% of their knowledge pertaining to social issues via online resources (Paek, Hove, Jeong, & Kim, 2011). Social media venues including organizational campaign websites are increasingly used to relay such information.

Utilizing a campaign directed website allows for the use of multidisciplinary media tools, reaching out to possible abusers, victims, professionals, advocates, friends, neighbors, or anyone who might just be curious. Linking the campaign site to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Donate, Google+, and campaign blogs allows the campaign events, news, conferences, training, reports, videos, fact sheets, interests, and more to be sent off in a horizontal manner to all subscribers who have expressed interest at some time. Research has found that sites that offer user-generated content (UGC) and persuasive messages that come from peers or those more similar to themselves, have greater impact on viewers (Paek et. al., 2011). This effect can be utilized by the encouragement of viewers to 'share' or post the same important information bottoms-up to family members, colleagues, and friends. Information is taken in and then there is often a process of active involvement. Not only is it possible for increased social interaction and

communication among viewers, but users are also able to obtain educational materials and learn about the signs of abuse, steps to protect children, and techniques of positive parenting, among other important topics, at the click of a button (Paek, et. al., 2011).

The use of mass media and PSA's, such as those that have been proven effective for SIDS, Shaken Baby Syndrome, and other important topics, offer a low cost broad-based dissemination of knowledge on an issue to a large audience (Rheingold, et. al., 2007). These video or audio messages can also be produced for UCG's such as YouTube and/or embedded into the social media sites, created by an organization dedicated to the safety of children, for an instantaneous spread both nationally and internationally. Of young persons aged 18-29, 89% admitted to using video-sharing sites such as YouTube (Paek, et. al., 2011). These messages can then be viewed beyond the limited televised slots and potentially reach previously untapped audiences. Thus, using an organizational media web page and incorporating the combined use of UCGs, social media venues, and targeted media brochures, booklets, and other materials that may be retrievable for online viewers, is a desirable combination.

## **B. Messages That Elicit Response and Action**

A baby cries incessantly and the young parent, who was aggressively disciplined as a child, is at the end of their rope. What can be said or shown to that parent to make them seek parenting help or to prevent them from some potentially abusive behavior? A father is grooming his daughter for sexual abuse. What message might elicit a self-report or cue others who may suspect to take action? The content of messages that an organization develops to send via social media, when seeking to ultimately change a behavior, should first produce an awareness of the issue, then interest, then evaluation, and ultimately conviction (Paek, et.al., 2011). Previous research has found that parents cited the media most often for their source of knowledge on sexual abuse. However, despite its influence, there is still a



significant shortage of research examining media message content on child abuse prevention (Rheingold, et. al., 2007).

Public service announcements and video training sources related to child abuse utilize most often racially diverse pictures of children's faces and personal stories of abuse survivors with an emphasis on feelings and statistics. Perceived similarity including characteristics such as shared values, demographics, shared ideas, shared values and shared experiences can elicit a feeling of close identification with the source and be more persuasive (Paek, et. al., 2011). Real-world examples are used to bring the topic closer to home for the viewer or reader, and to eliminate the fear and taboo of the topic. This is important for reaching out to young people who may be concerned about their own parenting ability due to childhood experience with aggressive discipline or abuse. The best PSAs are those that are empathetic and that can elicit a sense of caring about the issue at hand and that build a trust with the audience (Toncar, Reid, & Anderson, 2007). Research has shown messages delivered by peers, or those that individuals can more closely relate to personally, are more effective in eliciting response or action from low involvement viewers. As individuals gain knowledge and awareness, messages delivered by expert sources are evaluated more closely. A report by the Ad Council recently suggested the significance of using social media and UCGs to motivate youth to get involved with important social issues (Paek, 2011). Campaigns that include resources, such as hotline numbers, e-mail addresses, information on how to talk to children about abuse, and recognizable signs of abuse, help those who have little knowledge, to potentially gain enough skill and confidence to seek help and to report if they are victim or suspect abuse.

### **C. Organizations That Benefit From Social Media**

Social media is becoming increasingly popular for many, if not most, businesses and organizations. For most, it is the preferred method of obtaining resumes of potential future employees, of company awareness, of logo circulation, and many times product sales. Paek, et al (2007), suggests that federal governments and non-profit organizations would benefit by encouraging social media campaigns and active participation. Consistent with what we have noted as the mission and goals of many non-profit child abuse prevention organizations, social media provides an effective tool for creating public

awareness, promoting adult responsibility, promoting positive adult-child policies, promoting policy advancement, and educating adults in an effort to reduce child sexual abuse (Darkness to Light, 2012; Children's Trust Fund, 2012; Paek, 2011). Additionally, encouraging engagement of target audiences in social media messages and content may be a cost-effective tool because it saves in the costs of production and placement.

Of those who are working in the area of child abuse prevention and intervention, organizations that promote primary prevention and policy advocate groups are likely to benefit most via social media. It is recognized that a social media initiative may not alone be enough to prevent abuse, but is an effective tool in the social movement (Rheingold, et. al., 2007). Theory supports the need for primary prevention of child abuse and the need to provide readily available information on resources for young parents or those experiencing difficult times, including economic hardship (Akers, 1994; Hirschi, 1969; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Wood, et al, 2012). Awareness and education directed at adults and aimed at keeping children safe and reporting suspicions, as well as, legislation and policy awareness and voter support, are well suited to social media campaign design. Social media campaigns are less suited to programs utilizing personal professional involvement such as those dedicated to child self-empowerment, therapeutic intervention, and offender treatment, other than as informational resources and references. The federal government, national organizations such as Darkness to Light, Stop It Now!, and Children's Trust Fund, as well as, local organizations such as child advocacy centers, faith-based abuse education programs, and abuse shelters may benefit by social media involvement. Social media initiatives assist in increasing awareness of the issue of child abuse, promoting regulations on child-adult one-on-one engagement, awareness of policy and legislative movements in the field, awareness of the services that they provide, personal and economic support for organizational efforts, and an increase in communication and 'talk' about the issue. The use of social media has great potential to reach a large and diverse population that is affected directly and indirectly by the public health issue of child abuse (Rheingold, 2007).

## **SECTION VI: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The recognized public health issue of child abuse is no longer a secret and the “taboo” nature of the topic is being increasingly impeded. Child abuse can be defined in many different ways, but minimally it refers to “...any recent act or failure to act on the part of the parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm” (CAPTA, 2010). Definitions however, vary from state to state and across organizations, creating ambiguity for mandated reporters and others in recognizing some forms of abuse. Additionally, it is known that child abuse goes largely unreported (London, et al, 2005; Hodson & Skeen, 1987). Due to the serious nature of the issue and the complexities of defining, recognizing, and reporting the offense, public awareness, education, and support are key components to its prevention (Darkness to Light, 2012; Portwood, 2006; MMWR, 2001).

Child abuse is often part of an intergenerational cycle where the harmful effects of abuse are experienced by the children of those who were abused as children (Hodson & Skeen 1987). In Wisconsin, in 2010, 83% of child abuse offenders were primary caregivers of the child victim (Wisconsin Department of Children & Families, 2010). Social learning theory (Akers, 1994), and social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) provide insight into the link between parent behavior and parent-child interaction and subsequent offending behavior. Research shows a link between the breakdown of these important early caregiver relationships and the future potential to offend (Widom, 1989; Widom & Maxfield, 2001; Huesmann, et al, 2002). The majority of abuse happens when a child is left alone with an unknown offender, often someone they believe can be trusted. Routine activity theory provides framework for creating public awareness of the adult child one-on-one rules for organizations, clubs, events, and care provider locales (Cohen &

Felson, 1979; Reid & Sullivan, 2010). Additionally, strain theory provides a possible explanation for why studies such as the one conducted by researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia show an increase in child abuse with trends of increased mortgage delinquencies and home foreclosures (Wood, et al, 2012). Since many of these offenders are young, it makes sense to utilize the preferred method for acquiring the majority of their knowledge pertaining to social issues, namely online resources and social media, to offer education and resources designed for child abuse prevention (Paek, et al, 2011).

A number of organizations today utilize social media campaigns in their vision to protect children from abuse. Children's Trust Fund of Wisconsin uses social media in the marketing of its name and logo to create awareness of its presence as a provider of child abuse prevention programs and initiatives, to publicize and promote new developments in the field, to actively promote public policy, and to identify those efforts that are most effective in preventing abuse of Wisconsin's children (Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, 2012). Stop It Now!, another such organization, uses a public health framework and a variety of media venues including radio and online resources to promote their services and reporting to their available helpline (Stop It Now! Wisconsin, 2012). Darkness to Light, a non-profit organized with the mission of using public awareness and education, largely conducted via social media, to reduce child abuse (Darkness to Light, 2012). The comprehensive inclusion of PSAs, social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others, online and facilitated training, and targeted materials available online makes this campaign effective in its efforts to create awareness and teach abuse prevention skills. The federal government and updated legislation, including the CAPTA Reauthorization Act (2010) and the Keeping Children and families Safe Act (2003), assists prevention efforts by creating awareness and providing annual funding for research and

demonstration grants, training and technical assistance agreements, and longitudinal research contracts, which are designed to evaluate and determine the best practices for keeping our children safe from abuse (Brodowski, et al, 2007).

Since no single approach to the prevention of child abuse is going to be effective in the elimination of child abuse, it is important to utilize campaign components that are proven to have positive effect on awareness and knowledge and also the potential to create involvement and support, in order to give prevention efforts momentum and continued funding. In today's technological society, social media is used by the government, businesses, and non-profit organizations to create awareness of names, logos, policies, and legislation (Rheingold, et al, 2007). It is also used to inform, educate, and elicit support, both personal and financial. The interaction and communication available to individuals through social media sites can mean greater audience reach than many other venues. The research in the field related to social media and prevention is relatively new and there is greater need for evaluative study, particularly on the long term behavioral effects of campaign exposure and training however, some social media campaigns have been shown to increase awareness and knowledge of abuse prevention and may also have an effect on primary prevention behaviors if the message is reinforced over time (Darkness to Light, 2012; Rheingold, et al, 2007). When the goal is to modify behaviors, such as the desire for more active participation in preventing and reporting child abuse, Paek (2011) suggests that the campaign must first create awareness, then interest, then evaluation, and ultimately conviction. Thus, an ideal media campaign designed for child abuse prevention might utilize an organized website with organization information and educational materials, linked to the additional social media venues such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube or other UCGs, and blogs. The site would house or link, via UCGs, PSAs that involve empathetic peer

produced messages, perhaps from a diverse group of abuse survivors, which could elicit trust and support. The initiative would then encourage sharing of information from readers to others connected to them personally or via internet in an effort to increase audience base and support. An ideal campaign may find it beneficial to utilize the donation feature to increase continued support for research and evaluation of program effectiveness. As technology advances there will be even more available option and options may change. It is important to note that continued evaluations of programs are necessary to determine what works for individual organizations and in particular areas, with specific populations. A combination of efforts in prevention, intervention, and treatment are needed to address the overwhelming issue of child abuse that plagues our society.

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